Jan Marten Ivo Klaver – *Università di Urbino*

The Romantic Tradition in *Alton Locke*'s Dreamland

jmi.klaver@uniurb.it

In the Wordsworthian tradition the adult has to go back to his childhood to find the sources for spiritual growth and rebirth, but in his novel *Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet. An Autobiography* (1850) Charles Kingsley goes one step further: he has his hero trace his own past in terms of a greater 'evolutionary' process in which "the longing of my life to behold that cradle of mankind was satisfied" (Kingsley 1850:335). Moving through "the lowest point of created life" he starts as a madrepore, then becomes in succession a soft crab, a remora, an ostrich, a mylodon, a baby-ape in Bornean forests, and, finally, "a child upon a woman's bosom". At each stage Alton is very much aware of his own self and the state he is in, so much so that he exclaims in retrospect: "Where I had picked up the sensation which my dreams realized for me, I know not; my waking life, alas! had never given me experience of it. Had the mind power of creating sensations for itself? Surely it does so, [...] which would seem to give my namesake's philosophy the lie" (Kingsley 1850:338). It is in Alton's dreamland that Kingsley diverges significantly from John Locke's philosophy of knowledge.

Kingsley's impressive use of the successive stages of animal creation on earth has elicited numerous brief reactions that range from confusion to admiration, but very little in terms of analysis. Still, the dream is conceived of along regular ideas and concepts. Starting as a polyp without any distinct individuality – "I grew and grew, and the more I grew the more I divided, and multi-

plied thousand and ten thousand-fold" (Kingsley 1850:336) – Alton moves through the different stages of low animal life to mammal life and finally to man, each stage adding to his individuality and human qualities. During each reincarnation, Alton is judged and refused by Lillian, the woman he loves, and exterminated by his cousin, Lilian's husband. The following passage, which reflects much of Kingsley's own inner sense of insecurity, frustration and shame, is a most effective and uncomfortable example:

> And I was a soft crab, under a stone on the seashore. With infinite starvation, and struggling, and kicking, I had got rid of my armour, shield by shield, and joint by joint, and cowered, naked and pitiable, in the dark, among dead shells and ooze. Suddenly the stone was turned up; and there was my cousin's hated face laughing at me, and pointing me out to Lillian. She laughed too, as I looked up, sneaking, ashamed, and defenceless, and squared up at him with my soft useless claws. Why should she not laugh? Are not crabs, and toads, and monkeys, and a hundred other strange forms of animal life, jests of nature – embodiments of a divine humour, at which men are meant to laugh and be merry? But alas! my cousin, as he turned away, thrust the stone back with his foot, and squelched me flat. (Kingsley 1850:337)

When Alton reaches the mammal state as a South American sloth, the tension between the animal and the human comes out for the first time. Although Alton (as a mylodon) "had never before suspected the delight of mere physical exertion" (Kingsley 1850:338), a "spark of humanity [...] was slowly rekindling" in him, a humanity which initially articulates itself in a spark of altruistic feeling when mylodon-Alton brings on his own death when trying to save his cousin's. As a result, Alton is reborn as a baby-ape and feels "stirring in me germs of a new and higher consciousness," and is able to define a "yearning of love towards the mother ape", but finally "the animal faculties in me were swallowing up the intellectual" (Kingsley 1850:341). Lillian once more recoils from Alton – "[s]he pointed up to me in terror and disgust" – and the cousin appears and shoots Alton. But Alton has learned the basic qualities of altruism and love, and is now ready to be reincarnated as a social human being. The following stages Alton has to go through in the second part of the dream are spiritual rather than physical.

In producing a sequence of states of organic existence from the madrepore to ape to man, Kingsley conveys very much what Tennyson expressed in the epilogue of *In Memoriam* in the very same year. Both are fascinating instances of how educated Victorians pondered the development theory which reached them from (Lyell's representation of) Lamarck through to Chambers's *Vestiges of Creation*, and both are emotional searches for the self in the stunning

and imbecile vastness of what increasingly seemed an indifferent universe. More important than the idea that these early dreams anticipate Darwinian evolution (which strictly speaking they do not), is the representation of instinctive physical strength and a struggling consciousness of moral strength of purpose in man. As Kingsley felt fascinated by the idea of successive creations on a perfect (divine) plan, it is not surprising that he should have tried to link the animal and spiritual in an even more comprehensive theory of successive development in which a notion of improvement stands central. Thus, Alton's dreams do show why Kingsley thought Darwinism so attractive when he, and the world, became acquainted with it ten years later.

In 1850, however, Kingsley's dream chapter clearly perplexed the first reviewers. Whereas *Fraser's Magazine* and *The Times* kept conspicuously silent about Alton's delirious dreams, the reviewer in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* frankly admitted that these "visions of delirium [were] ambitiously written, but without either myth or meaning, so far as we can discover", that they were "decidedly of a tawdry and uninterpretable description". Moreover he adds that the dreams "bear internal evidence of having been copied at second-hand from Richter" (Aytoun 1850:596). The reviewer made an interesting point here, which, however, has not been followed up by later critics, not even in the recent renewed interest in Kingsley's novel.

The German Romantic author Johann Paul Friedrich Richter, commonly known under the pseudonym Jean Paul, made frequent use in his works of mystical dreams – short independent visionary pieces in dream form called 'Traumdichtungen' – which display an obsession with conflicting polarities such as thought and feeling, temporal and eternal, despair and hope and are generally ways to overcome a tendency to atheism in the dreamer. (Smeed 1966:6,69) Kingsley, who always showed genuine interest in German literature, had most likely read Richter's works or knew about them through Carlyle, who wrote two essays on the German author in the 1830s, including a translation of one of his dreams. In his works he is mentioned regularly and Carlyle did not hesitate to evoke Richterian language and imagery to convey Teufelsdröckh's religious despair and his subsequent sensation of rebirth and faith in *Sartor Resartus* [1]. For example, in the "Rede des todten Christus"in *Siebenkäs*, the dream Carlyle translated for his 1830 essay on Jean Paul, Christ "schauete in den Abgrund", or, in Carlyle's translation, "looked down into the

[1] In the following discussion I am much indebted to J.W. Smeed, who, in his study *Jean Paul's 'Dreams'* (1966), noted the parallels between Jean Paul's "Rede des Todten Christus" and Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*.

Abyss", which in *Sartor Resartus* becomes "through the ruins as of a shivered Universe was he falling, falling, toward the abyss". Kingsley's hero too "looked down the abysses" and "fell and fell for ages". Compare the further affinty between the following two sets of passages:

> Ich stieg herab [...] und schauete in den Abgrund. (Paul 1986:I.643)
>
> I descended [...] and looked down into the Abyss. (Carlyle's translation of "Rede des Todten Christus" in Smeed 1966:87)
>
> I was doomed to climb and climb forever [...] I looked down the abysses (Kingsley 1850:335)

and

> Ein unermesslich augedehnter Glockenhammer sollte die letzte Stunde der Zeit schlagen und das Weltgebäude zerslittern (Paul 1983:I.645)
>
> An immeasurably-extended Hammer was to strike the last hour of Time, and shiver the Universe asunder (Carlyle's translation of "Rede des Todten Christus" in Smeed 1966:87)
>
> thick curtains of Night rushed over his soul, as rose the immeasurable Crash of Doom; and through the ruins as of a shivered Universe (Carlyle 1940:112)
>
> an earthquake shook the hills – great sheets of woodland slid roaring and crashing into the valleys – a tornado swept through the temple halls, which rocked and tossed like a vessel in a storm: a crash [...] buried me (Kingsley 1850:336)

But although Kingsley seems to have picked up many elements of the "Rede des todten Christus" distilled in *Sartor Resartus*, Alton's dream also seems to owe much to Jean Paul directly. It is difficult to pinpoint one clear example for Alton's dream, and ingredients of at least three other Traumdichtungen are present. In a later dream in *Siebenkäs* a character is, like Alton, laid up with a fever and the delirious visions of his illness turn into a nightmarish dream of destruction and annihilation, a state also evoked by Kingsley at the beginning of his dream chapter. The river Alton is doomed to climb up is reminiscent of Albano's second dream in *Titan*:

> Ich fuhr in einem weissen Kahn auf einem finstern Strom, der zwischen glatten, hohen Marmorwänden schoss. An meine einsame Welle gekettet, flog ich bange im Felse-Gewinde, in das zuweilen tief ein Donnerkeil einfuhr. Plötzlich drehte sich der Strom immer breiter und wilder um eine Wendeltreppe herum und hi-

> nab. – Da lag ein weites, plattes, graues Land um mich, das die Sonne-Sichel mit einem eklen, erdfahlen Licht begoss. (Paul 1986:II.455)
>
> A river ran from its summit; and up that river-bed it seemed I was doomed to climb and climb forever, millions and millions of miles upward, against the stream. The thought was intolerable, and I shrieked aloud [...] My eyes revelled in vastness, as they swept over the broad flat jungle at the mountain feet, a desolate sheet of dark gigantic grasses (Kingsley 1850:335)

More interestingly still, the final dream of *Flegeljahre* is presented in the form of a creation myth which traces the genesis of the earth out of the "Welt-ei" in a watery chaos through a series of brutal images of animal earthly desire – "Heisshunger und Blutdurst" (Paul 1986:III.377). In general, the cosmological vastness of its settings, and the religious and mystical sensations of Jean Paul's dreamers, are present in Alton's dream, and the rhythmical language of the Traumdichtungen is successfully reproduced by Kingsley.

These examples seem to indicate that Kingsley was indeed much influenced by Jean Paul's Traumdichtungen, as the reviewer in *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine* maintained, but to say that these dream passages were "copied at second-hand" from the German writer is excessive and unfair to Kingsley's genius. Although there are a few signs of verbal parallels, which most likely crept in through Kingsley's knowledge of *Sartor Resartus*, the other parallels mentioned here do not bear traces of copying or rewriting Jean Paul, but rather show a wish to write in the tradition of the German Traumdichtungen. Moreover, the theme which is at the base of most of Jean Paul's dreams – the existence of a "zweite Welt" – is not uncommon in Kingsley's works generally. Alton's journey into the unconscious past of mankind is, in fact, not unlike the baptismal rebirth of Tom that Kingsley created thirteen years later in *The Water-Babies*. For example, Alton's dreamland is initially described as his soul being carried "to a cavern by the sea-side, and [being] dropped [in]" and he "fell and fell for ages", till he has, like Tom, to start his process of regeneration from the very bottom of creation. Kingsley clearly felt fascinated with the idea by falling from a height or precipice into another world. Thus Tregarva in *Yeast* is converted on the brink of a Cornish mine-shaft where he "saw through the ground all the water in the shafts glaring like blood, and all the sides of the shafts fierce red-hot. As if hell was coming up" (Kingsley 1851: 255), something which kept haunting his dreams: "falling down them, down, down, all night long, till I awoke screaming" (Kingsley 1851:254). A turning point in the uncompleted novel *The Tutor's Story* is also created, though less skilfully managed, when Mr Brownlow falls in a wide black fissure in the

Yorkshire countryside and wavers on the brink of death for a dark and cold night before being rescued. The experience is again presented as a dream-like sensation (Kingsley 1916:132-3). But Alton's fall stands out from all these in its spellbound tracing of the biological and spiritual origins of man. From the creation of the earth to the final boring of the mountain, which is developed along the lines of Moses leading the people into the Holy Land, the whole episode is truly Mosaic in scope.

With Alton's dream Kingsley returned to the structure of *Sartor Resartus* by signalling the passage from the 'Everlasting No' to the 'Everlasting Yea', from utter negation to acceptance of the "poor, miserable, hampered, despicable Actual" as the Ideal (Carlyle 1940:148). It is therefore only natural that Kingsley would emphasize in it the Carlylean idea of duty and work which made the acceptance of the Actual possible and reveals Kingsley's answer to Chartism:

> But I went out, and quarried steadfastly at the mountain. And when I came back the next morning, the poor had risen against the rich, one and all, crying, 'As you have done to us, so will we do to you'; and they hunted them down like wild beasts, and slew many of them, and threw their carcases on the dunghill, and took possession of their land and houses, and cried, 'We will be all free and equal as our forefathers were, and live here, and eat and drink, and take our pleasure.'
>
> Then I ran out, and cried to them, Tools! will you do as these rich did, and neglect the work of God! If you do to them as they have done to you, you will sin as they sinned, and devour each other at the last, as they devoured you. The old paths are best. Let each man, rich or poor, have his equal share of the land, as it was at first, and go up and dig through the mountain, and possess the good land beyond, where no man need jostle his neighbour, or rob Him, when the land becomes too small for you. Were the rich only in fault? Did not you, too, neglect the work which the All-Father had given you, and run every man after his own comfort? So you entered into a lie, and by your own sin raised up the rich men to be your punishment. For the last time, who will go up with me to the mountain?' Then they all cried with one voice, 'We have sinned! We will go up and pierce the mountain, and fulfil the work which God set to our forefathers.' We went up, and the first stroke that I struck, a crag fell out; and behold, the light of day! and far below us the good land and large, stretching away boundless towards the western sun. (Kingsley 1850:347-8)

At this point Alton is ready to wake up. It is out of such dreams that the dreamer in the Romantic tradition awakes cured and reborn. After a "healing sleep, the heavy dreams rolled gradually away, and I awoke to a new Heaven and a new Earth", Carlyle has Teufelsdröckh say in *Sartor Resartus*, (Carlyle

1940:141) and Alton too, "passed, like one who recovers from drowning through the painful gate of birth into another life" (Kingsley 1850:359). Although the underlying idea is again Jean Paul's, it is Carlyle's direct influence which is more palpable here. Compare:

> ... als ich erwachte. Meine Seele weinte vor Freude, dass sie wieder Gott anbeten konnte (Paul 1986:I.645)
>
> ... WHEN I AWOKE. My soul wept for joy that I could still pray to God ... (Carlyle's translation of "Rede des Todten Christus" in Smeed 1966:87)
>
> The heavy dreams rolled gradually away, and I awoke to a new Heaven and a new Earth. (Carlyle 1940:141)
>
> ... behold, the light of day! and far below us the good land and large, stretching away boundless towards the western sun [...] I passed, like one who recovers from drowning, through the painful gate of birth into another life (Kingsley 1850:359)

But Alton's reconciliation with the Actual, with necessity and freewill, is not simply Teufelsdröckh's either. It had been made clear earlier on in the novel that such conclusions might lead to the meaningless, because outdated, pantheism of Ralph Waldo Emerson. Moreover, nature as a healing force was simply not available to the urban worker in early Victorian society. Therefore, waking up, Alton is reconverted to Christianity and is made aware of the fallacy of his ideal, with the Charter "dead, and liberty further off than ever", that "You are free; God has made you free. You are equals – you are brothers" (Kingsley 1850:361).

It is in the final chapters that Alton embraces what F.D. Maurice's theology taught, and as with the introduction of the Prophet in *Yeast*, turns the *Alton Locke* into a celebration of his ideals of Christian brotherhood. The ex-aristocrat Eleanor, who nurses Alton through his illness, also turns out to be his spiritual nurse. She tells him how she herself had "succeeded [in projects of association] – as others will succeed, long after my name, my small endeavours, are forgotten amid the great new world – *new church* I should have said – of enfranchised and fraternal labour" (Kingsley 1850:376; italics mine). It is the clergy (of the Church of England) who are to lead the people to association: "Without the priesthood there is no freedom for the people." (Kingsley 1850:380) The final turn of the novel is thus away from Locke, away even from Carlyle, in a complete embrace of Maurice's teaching of the kingdom of Christ. As such, *Alton Locke* was a perfect expression of the Christian Socialist movement, out of which it grew.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

[Aytoun, W.E.] (1850), "Alton Locke, Tailor and Poet: An Autobiography", *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*, 68: 592-610.

Carlyle, Thomas (1940), *Sartor Resartus; On Hero Worship*, London, Dent.

Cripps, Elizabeth A. (1983), "Introduction to 'Alton Locke'", in Kingsley (1850) 1983: vii-xxviii.

Gottlieb, Evan M. (2001), "Charles Kingsley, the Romantic Legacy, and the Unmaking of the Working-Class Intellectual", *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 29: 51-65.

Hall, Donald E. (ed., 1994), *Muscular Christianity: Embodying the Victorian Age*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.

Hall, Donald E., (1994) "On the Making and Unmaking of Monsters: Christian Socialism, Muscular Christianity, and the Metamorphazation of Class Conflict", in Hall (ed., 1994): 45-65.

Hartley, Allen J. (1977), *The Novels of Charles Kingsley; A Christian Social Interpretation*, Folkestone, Hour-Glass Press.

Haynes, R.D. (1987), "The Multiple Functions of Alton Locke's Dreamland", *Cahiers Victoriens et Edouardiens*, 25: 29-37.

Kaye, Richard A. (1999), "'Determined Raptures': St. Sebastian and the Victorian Discourse of Decadence", *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 27: 269-303.

Kingsley, Charles (1850), *Alton Locke: Tailor and Poet. An Autobiography*, ed. Elizabeth A. Cripps, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1983.

Kingsley, Charles (1851), *Yeast: A Problem*, London, John W. Parker.

Kingsley, Charles (1916), *The Tutor's Story*, New York, Dodd, Mead.

Menke, Richard (2000), "Cultural Capital and the Scene of Rioting: Male Working-Class Authorship in *Alton Locke*", *Victorian Literature and Culture*, 28: 87-108.

Rauch, Alan (1993), "The Tailor Transformed: Kingsley's Alton Locke and the Notion of Change", *Studies in the Novel*, 25: 196-213.

Paul, Jean (1986), *Werke,* 3 Bde., München, ed. Norbert Miller, Carl Hanser Verlag.

Reboul, Marc (1973), *Charles Kingsley; La formation d'une personnalité et son affirmation litteraire (1819-1850)*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France.

Rosen, David (1994), "The Volcano and the Cathedral: Muscular Christianity and the Origins of Primal Manliness", in Hall (ed. 1994): 17-44.

Smeed, J.W. (1966), *Jean Paul's "Dreams"*, London, Oxford University Press.

Uffelman, Larry K. (1979), *Charles Kingsley*, Boston, Twayne.